

**Rural Law Center of New York, Inc.**  
56 Cornelia Street/Plattsburgh, New York 12901  
(518) 561-5460

## **JUDGES' BEST PRACTICES CLE/PRO BONO PROGRAM**

In these changing times, the growing demand for access to justice increases the importance of encouraging attorney pro bono activity in New York State. Additionally, the issue of increased need for pro bono involvement in the rural areas of the state, has become more apparent. Since rural practitioners often practice alone, or in small firms, they often do not have the resources available in urban areas. Therefore, they routinely face difficulties of time and distance when trying to meet their mandatory Continuing Legal Education (CLE) requirements. Recognizing both the rural need for pro bono activity and the rural attorney's need for accessible CLE courses, the Rural Law Center of New York, Inc. (RLCNY) initiated its innovative "Judges' Best Practices" Pro Bono/CLE Project four years ago.

As an accredited CLE provider in New York State, the Rural Law Center travels to rural counties statewide to deliver on-site, locally specific and credit bearing CLE presentations. Each presentation is essentially a partnership between the Rural Law Center and the local judiciary, the local bar association and the local legal services program. Generally scheduled as half-day sessions, with the curriculum designed and taught by local judges, these seminars focus on the practice areas of Supreme Court, Family Court, County Court and Surrogate's Court. This model serves the needs of all partners in the project. The judges are able to demonstrate their court's specific expectations and thereby elevate the level of practice. Practicing attorneys receive useful information and guidance from the local courts. And most importantly, attending attorneys (in lieu of registration fees) agree to provide pro bono services that are administered by the local legal services program or the local bar association.

The Rural Law Center is funded primarily by the IOLA Fund of the State of New York and works to supplement funding from a variety of private and public sources. In the overall project (at end of first quarter 2003), over 950 attorneys from 26 rural counties have attended these trainings and made commitments to pro bono service in their communities. With an average of 10 hours and at a rate of \$150 hr., this program has generated approximately \$1,425,000 in free legal services. For the balance 2003, the Rural Law Center has scheduled seven new trainings and will continue to add additional dates and locations.

The Rural Law Center is funded primarily by the IOLA Fund of the State of New York. The pilot project was also funded by the American Bar Association and the New York Bar Foundation.